



**PRESS RELEASE**  
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**For Immediate Release**

July 16, 2003

**TWO SENTENCED TO PRISON FOR VA BENEFIT FRAUD**

Tampa, FL - On July 15, 2003, United States District Judge James D. Whittemore sentenced Michael Pond, 57, of St. Petersburg, Florida, to 24 months' imprisonment and to pay restitution in the amount of \$461,445.56 for theft of government funds.

Pond, a partially disabled veteran, pleaded guilty March 25, 2003. During that proceeding he admitted that in 1988 he had appeared for a physical examination at a Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) hospital in a wheelchair and falsely claimed that he was unable to walk unassisted. To further mislead the examining physicians, he had soaked his feet in cold water before he had departed for the examining facility. As a result of his fraudulent conduct, the VA substantially increased the amount of his disability benefit payments. Pond continued to collect disability benefits at the inflated rate for the next 15 years and thereby stole more than \$460,000 from the VA.

In an unrelated case, on July 11, 2003, Oliver Gause, 41, of New Port Richey, Florida, was sentenced by United States District Judge Steven D. Merryday to 15 months' imprisonment and to pay restitution in the amount of \$108,162 for theft of government funds.

Gause pleaded guilty March 13, 2003. Court documents reflect that after the death of Gause's mother, a recipient of widow's benefits administered by the VA, the VA erroneously continued to directly deposit benefit payments into a joint checking account that Gause had maintained with his mother. During the next 11 years, Gause wrongfully converted more than \$100,000 of those funds.

These cases were investigated by the Government Program Fraud Task Force. The Task Force, formed to combat fraud against the United States government, is comprised of Special Agents from the Office of Inspector General, Department of Veterans Affairs; the Federal Bureau of Investigation; the Office of Inspector General, Social Security Administration; the Office of Inspector General, Department of Housing and Urban Development; the Criminal Investigation Division of the Internal Revenue Service; and a Postal Inspector. These cases were prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorney Robert A. Mosakowski, Chief, Tampa Division.